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LABOR DEPARTMENT FOR ILAB (TINA MCCARTER)
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SUBJECT: BARBADOS: UPDATE OF WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR
INFORMATION

REF: STATE 184972

¶1. Summary: While Barbados does not have a comprehensive policy or action program on child labor, it does have a solid framework of policies in areas connected with child labor, including education, child care, welfare, social security, and labor administration. Barbados has only recently begun focusing on the issue of child labor, having been jolted into action by a 2002 ILO-conducted Rapid Assessment Study, which found a small percentage of the children surveyed engaged in activities suggestive of child labor and the worst forms of child labor. In seeking to address these issues, Barbados has been hampered by a lack of resources and a general tendency among Barbadians to avoid tackling sensitive issues like child labor or child abuse. End Summary.

¶2. The following answers are keyed to questions concerning worst forms of child labor contained in reftel:

A) Laws and regulations proscribing the worst forms of child labor.

Barbados has ratified both ILO Conventions 138 and 182. While Barbados has not adopted legislation addressing child labor per se, the country has in place laws and regulations on minimum age, compulsory education, childcare protection, social security, and labor administration, as well as the criminal code, which outlaws among other things prostitution, pornography, and drug trafficking. A 2005 ILO Review of Child Labor Laws of Barbados gave Barbados generally high marks for the legislative measures that are in place to shield children from child labor and the worst forms of child labor. The ILO Review suggested several legislative and regulatory changes, which are currently under review by the government of Barbados, according to Shelley Carrington, the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

Most significantly, Barbados currently lacks a list of hazardous occupations or occupations considered to be the worst forms of child labor. In a meeting with LaborOff, Carrington stated that the ILO asked Barbados to develop the list of hazardous occupations by spring 2007, but Carrington acknowledged that her Ministry has made little headway on this priority project. She said that she plans to ask the ILO for a sample list and guidance on whether the list must be adopted by the government through the legislative process. Barbados is, however, in the process of implementing the

2005 Law on Occupational Health and Safety, which should fill an important gap in Barbados' labor laws. According to the Chief Labour Officer, Edla Lowe, the government expects to promulgate most of the regulations related to the 2005 law by the end of 2006.

Barbados' minimum age for employment is set at 16, which is also the age until which children are required to attend school. In its 2005 Review, the ILO suggested that the definition of Barbados' minimum age should apply to all sectors of the economy, rather than the much narrower current scope of "industrial undertakings and ships" only. The ILO Review also suggested that Barbados' Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act be amended to clarify and narrow its definition of light work.

B) Regulations for implementation and enforcement of proscription against the worst forms of child labor.

The government implements and enforces labor laws through the Department of Labour in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The Department has eight industrial relations inspectors and four occupational safety and health inspectors. All of these inspectors received training on child labor issues during a November 2005 ILO-sponsored workshop. While the inspectors conduct periodic inspections, both announced and unannounced, of Barbadian companies, Carrington noted that they have yet to uncover any problems with child labor. According to Carrington, any children engaged in illegal work or in the worst forms of child labor would do so in the country's informal economy, over which the Department of Labour has little oversight. The Child Care Board is charged with investigating all matters concerning

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the welfare of children and the Royal Barbados Police Force would investigate all suspected criminal activities.

According to Carrington, the government has little data on the extent of child labor and the worst forms of child labor problems in Barbados. The results of the ILO's 2002 Rapid Assessment Study, which found instances suggestive of child labor and the worst forms of child labor in Barbados, surprised the government, which until then did not focus on these issues. Carrington said that Barbados "woke up" as a result of the Rapid Assessment, and the government has begun taking measures to address the problems. The government developed a "survey instrument," which was piloted in the school system and is now being used by social agencies to collect data on potential instances of the worst forms of child labor. The survey has come into use only in October 2006, and according to Carrington, preliminary results will not be available until spring 2007.

While this is a positive first step, Carrington thought that uncovering the true extent of the worst forms of child labor problem in Barbados would be extremely difficult because the government lacks the necessary resources and expertise. She also noted that the problem remains hidden not only because it is illegal but also because of Barbadians' general tendency to avoid discussing and seeking solutions to sensitive problems such as child abuse. Nevertheless, Carrington concluded from the ILO 2002 Rapid Assessment and anecdotal evidence that child labor and the worst forms of child labor problems were not widespread in Barbados. Barbados' growing economy, strong social safety net, and high standing in the UN Human Development Index would also suggest that Barbadian children would be less likely to resort to or be pressured into the worst forms of child labor because of poverty. Representatives of the ILO, Barbadian employers, and organized labor agreed with this assessment. Heather Stewart, a UNICEF Project Officer based in Barbados, was more cautious, noting that the lack of data should not be interpreted as an absence of the problem. Stewart agreed with Carrington's statement that the involvement of children in prostitution, pornography, and drug trafficking would

likely be among Barbados' most serious challenges.

The National Steering Committee on Child Labour, created in response to the ILO 2002 Rapid Assessment, has sought to raise Barbadians' awareness of child labor issues through educational workshops. These have been targeted at community groups, teachers, media, religious organizations, and the police. Furthermore, related issues such as child abuse have been receiving increasing attention in the media. UNICEF, which has been focused on the related issue of child abuse, has sought to strengthen the region's child abuse reporting and analysis of data, as well as to improve the targeting of government and other resources.

C) Whether there are social programs to prevent and withdraw children from the worst forms of child labor.

Barbados has used education as the primary tool to prevent child labor and the worst forms of child labor. Education is compulsory from the age of 5 to 16 years, and it is free through the tertiary level. Attendance at primary and secondary schools is monitored by the Ministry of Education's Truancy Office, and attendance problems are regularly reported to the Child Care Board. The government has announced plans for free pre-school education and hopes to double the country's number of university graduates over the next 10-15 years. The government has also established vocational and technical training programs.

D) Policies aimed at the elimination of the worst forms of child labor.

Barbados does not have a comprehensive policy or national program of action on child labor. Carrington acknowledged that this policy gap has hindered her Ministry's efforts to focus attention and resources on the problem of child labor. Nevertheless, the government has sought to use what instruments it does have available to raise awareness of the issue. The Minister of Labour, Rawle Eastmond, has publicly spoken out on the issue, as have other government officials.

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E) Progress toward eliminating the worst forms of child labor.

The government of Barbados has made some progress toward eliminating the worst forms of child labor. In response to the ILO 2002 Rapid Assessment, the government established the National Steering Committee on Child Labour, drawing together relevant stakeholders, including social agencies, the national HIV commission, police, UNICEF, etc. The Steering Committee and its various subcommittees have met to discuss child labor on a number of occasions, but even Carrington admitted that more needs to be done to translate these discussions into actions. So far, the educational workshops have been the most concrete result of the Steering Committee's work.

Some progress is also visible in raising public awareness of child labor and the worst forms of child labor. Sir Roy Trotman, General Secretary of the Barbados Workers Union and Worker Vice-Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body, recently made a passionate public appeal to Caribbean governments to focus on the issue of child labor. His commitment to this issue will help keep the pressure on the Barbadian government to continue its efforts to stamp out child labor and its worst forms.

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